

## Vayishlach: Obadiah 1:1-21



The conflict between Jacob and his brother Esau concluded peacefully in the Parashah, which ends with an entire chapter detailing Esau's descendants. Relations between them and Jacob's descendants, however, remained tense.

In the Bible's shortest book, read in its entirety for this Haftarah, Obadiah unleashes against Esau one of God's most powerful rhetorical barrages. He lambasts Esau's descendants in Edom, to Judah's southeast, for not standing with their cousins and neighbors, the Judeans, when enemies attacked Jerusalem. He exclaims that God will punish them, measure for measure (Hebrew: *midah k'neged midah*) for their betrayal: their allies will abandon them and lay them waste. Edom's destruction and the rebuilding of Jerusalem will lead to the establishment of God's divine kingship for the entire world.

Later, in the late 2nd century BCE, the Hasmonean King John Hyrcanus conquered Edom and forcibly converted the Edomites to Judaism<sup>1</sup>, thus ending the fraternal rivalry, perhaps in unity. Nonetheless, rabbinic traditions and subsequent generations of Jews have identified Edom with Rome, Christianity, and the West.

### Haftarah Breakdown

**Verse 1:1** Obadiah exclaims God's call unto the nations to battle Edom.

Obadiah 1:1	עובדיה א:א
The vision of Obadiah. Thus says the Lord God concerning Edom, "We have heard a message from the Lord, and an ambassador is sent among the nations. Arise, and let us rise against her in battle."	חזון עבדיה כה אמר אדני ה' לאדום שמועה שמענו מאת ה' וציר בגוים שלח קומו ונקומה עליה למלקמה:

**Verses 1:2-4:** God will cast down the arrogant nation of Edom from its mountainous heights of power and security, and make it a scorned, lowly nation.

Obadiah 1:4	עובדיה א:ד
"[Even] if you [Edom] ascend high as a vulture, and if you place your nest among the stars, from there I will bring you down," says the Lord.	אם תגביה כנשר ואם גבין כוכבים שים קנה משם אורידך נאם ה':

**Verses 1:5-7:** Obadiah laments, perhaps mockingly, how Edom's allies betrayed, ransacked, and destroyed it.

Obadiah 1:7	עובדיה א:ז
All your allies banished you [beyond your own] border. Those with whom you were at peace deceived and overcame you. [Your allies who ate] your bread [with you] placed snares under you. He [Edom] has no understanding.	עד הגבול שלחמה כל אנשי בריחה השיאוה וכלו לה אנשי שלמה לחמה ושימו מזור תחליה אין תבונה בו:

**Verses 1:8-9:** God will punish Edom by destroying its wise men and military might.

Obadiah 1:9	עובדיה א:ט
Your mighty men, O [Edomite city of] Teman, shall be dismayed, so that every man of Mount Esav will be cut off by slaughter.	וחתו גבוריה תיגמו למעו יגרת איש מהר עשו מקטל

<sup>1</sup> See Josephus Flavius, Antiquities of the Jews, [Book 13, Section 257](#).

Verses 1:10-14: Edom's destruction is God's punishment for having cheered and aided the enemies of his brother, the nation of Jacob/Israel, when they attacked Jerusalem. The prophet admonishes Edom for eight transgressions.

Obadiah 1:11	עובדיה א:י"א
On the day you [Edom] stood on the other side, on the day strangers captured [Judah's] possession[s], and foreigners entered his cities and cast lots for Jerusalem -- you, too, were like one of them!	ביום עמדך מנגד ביום שקבות זרים חילו ונכררים באו שערו [שערי] ועל-ירושלם ידו גורל גם-אתה פאתח מיהם:

Verses 1:15-21: Israel's remnant will demonstrate God's retributive justice and kingship over all as it returns to Jerusalem and the entire Land, restores its sanctity, and drives away and destroys Edom and its other enemies.

Obadiah 1:21	עובדיה א:כ"א
Saviors shall ascend Mt. Zion to judge the mountain of Esau - and the Lord shall have dominion!	ועלו מושעים בהר ציון לשפט את-הר עשו והיתה לה' המלוכה:

### Obadiah's Identity

There is widespread debate about Obadiah's identity and era.<sup>2</sup> The Talmud (Sanhedrin 39b) states that he was the same Obadiah, student of Elijah and servant of King Ahab, who sustained persecuted prophets in I Kings 18; some identify him as the unnamed husband of the Shunamite woman in I Kings 17, the opening story of the [Haftarah for Parashat Vayeirah](#). The Talmud (ad loc) also asserts that Obadiah was an Edomite convert to Judaism, as well as a descendant of Elifaz the colleague of Job and son of Esau, explaining the prophet's singular focus on Edom. In contrast, Ibn Ezra identifies him with no other Biblical Obadiah. Since Obadiah prophesied the First Temple's destruction (v. 11), many contemporary biblical scholars argue that he lived in Judah in the immediate aftermath of Jerusalem's destruction. Yet others place him in different eras, such as during the early Second Temple Era.

### Connections

The Midrash interprets Obadiah's prophecy to show that **God will eventually terminate Israel's current, seemingly endless exile**, associated with Edom.

Midrash Tanchuma, Vayetzei 2:1	מדרש תנחומא, ויצא ב:א
The Holy One, blessed be He, showed our father Jacob the guardian angel of Babylon ascending seventy rungs [= years] of the ladder and descending; [the guardian angel of] Media [Persia] ascending fifty-two rungs of the ladder, and descending; [the guardian angel] of Greece ascending one hundred rungs of the ladder, and descending - but [the guardian angel] of Edom ascended the ladder - and Jacob didn't know how many [rungs it ascended.] Jacob became fearful, saying, "Perhaps Edom will never have a descent!" The Holy One, blessed be He, said to him: "... even if you see him ascend unto Me, from there I will cast him down, as it is said (Obad. 1:4), ' "[Even] if you [Edom] ascend high as a vulture, and if you place your nest among the stars, from there I will bring you down," says the Lord. ' "	הראה לו הקדוש ברוך הוא לאבינו יעקב שרה של בכל עולה שבועין עוקים ויורד, ושל מזי תמשים וישנים ויורד, ושל יון מאה ויורד, ושל אדום עלה ולא ידע כמה. באותה שעה נהגרא יעקב אבינו ואמר, שמא לזה אין לו ירידה. אמר לו הקדוש ברוך הוא...אפלו אמה רואהו עולה אצלי, משם אני מורידו, שנאמר: אם תגביה כנשר ואם בין כוכבים שים קנה משם אורידה נאם ה' (עובדיה א, ד).

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<sup>2</sup> This paragraph summarizes the views found on p. 4 of Daat Mikra's introduction to Obadiah.